

## The politics of nostalgia: museum representations of Lafcadio Hearn in Japan

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*In the process of becoming a World Power, Japan has ruined the sensibility that has been formed during its long history. I would like to look at and re-examine what we have lost and abandoned* (Yamada Taichi, on his play about Hearn, in Kimura 2002: 387).

### Abstract

This paper looks at Japanese museum representations of Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904), a British author who is known as a lover of 'traditional' Japan, and examines how he is commemorated in 'places of memory' such as Matsue. In the Japanese context, any attempt to celebrate the memory of Hearn can be perceived as a nationalistic endeavour. Hearn Museums, however, have drawn a distinction between two types of nationalism, political and cultural, and museums representations confine Hearn to the latter. In postwar Japan, nationalism has been viewed as synonymous with militarism and chauvinism. Such being the case, despite Hearn's political and pragmatic aspects, he is consistently depoliticized as a Romantic author and used as a vehicle for nostalgia (cultural nationalism). Political nationalism and nostalgia, however, emerge from the same source: the emotional needs of a rapidly modernizing nation. Through an examination of museum representations of Hearn, I attempt to shed light on the issue of nationalism and identity in postwar Japan.

**Key words:** Japan, Lafcadio Hearn, Koizumi Yakumo, nationalism, nostalgia.

### Preface

This paper examines the museum representations of Lafcadio Hearn (or Koizumi Yakumo, 1850-1904) in three locations in Japan, Matsue, Kumamoto, and Yaizu, all of which are remembered in connection with Hearn as 'places of memory' where the past is constructed through a process of selective remembering and forgetting (Nora ed., 1984-92).

Hearn himself has long enjoyed popularity and fame in Japan as its most astute foreign interpreter.<sup>1</sup> Born on 27 June 1850, Hearn was the son of an Anglo-Irish father and a Greek mother, and was brought up in Ireland and England. He first arrived in Yokohama, Japan, in 1890, at the age of forty, as a journalist, and remained there until his death in 1904. During his fourteen-year stay in Japan, Hearn produced twelve literary works including *Kwaidan* (Ghost Stories, 1904). His works were well read in the pre-war West, especially after Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. His complete works were published in 1922 as *The Writings of Lafcadio Hearn* in sixteen volumes (Bisland (ed), 1922). Hearn's wide readership includes intellectuals such as Albert Einstein (1879-1955) and Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), the former of whom visited Japan in 1922 inspired by Hearn's works (Kaneko 2005). His reputation in the West, however, started to decline in the 1930s when Japan embarked on a period of imperialistic aggression, and 'went into eclipse' after the Second World War (Murray 1993: 23). In contrast to his continuing popularity in Japan, Hearn today remains a marginalized and indeed somewhat obscure author in the West.

In Japan, his works were only read by a few Japanese intellectuals (those who could read English) until the late 1920s when Japanese translations of his works were published and gained popularity. Celebrated in Japan for his appreciation and understanding of 'traditional' Japanese culture, he has been frequently depicted as 'more Japanese than the Japanese'.<sup>2</sup> Although Hearn was not the only foreign author perceived to be sympathetic to Japan, no other foreigner has been able to match his popularity and reputation. As Yu notes, 'it was Hearn alone who became part of Japan' (Yu 1964: 184).

Despite numerous studies on Hearn and his works, no analysis to date has focused specifically on the popular Japanese reception and interpretation of Hearn.<sup>3</sup> Given his significant impact on the Japanese imagination, this gap in the literature needs to be rectified. One way to shed light on Hearn's popular reception is to critically examine his museum representations. For the museum, as Luke notes, functions as 'a permanent tool to supplement the educational system for adults and youth of the community', and reflects 'very important political structures' (Luke 2002: xviii, 222). Museums impact on and help to forge the popular imagination. As emphasized by Kavanagh, because the museum is a visual space where 'visitors respond to image, colours, and textures in rather random yet highly personal ways', it can have a 'powerful' impact on imagination and memory (Kavanagh 1996: 3). The popular Japanese image of Hearn is therefore at least partly formed through museum representations of Hearn in addition to or even instead of any direct reading of Hearn's works. This paper will examine three major Hearn Museums as texts in an attempt to shed light on how Hearn is interpreted in contemporary Japan. I have followed Porter's analytical framework in identifying exhibit, curator, and visitor as equivalent to text, author, and reader (Porter 1996). That is, as a reader/visitor, I attempt to read and interpret museum texts – including not only exhibited objects and the museum building that contains them but curator's comments on the topic – and attempt to problematize the curator's intention. I visited each of the three museums, and examined each exhibition (including narrative comments, labels and objects), identifying in a consistent manner what is commemorated and what is left out (or what is remembered and what is forgotten). I collected museum pamphlets, consulted official websites, and corresponded with each museum. My concern is to analyze what each text means in relation to the socio-political realities of contemporary Japan rather than to examine the (biographical and literary) relevance of the museum text.

In the Japanese context, any attempt to celebrate the memory of Hearn, a well known lover of Japan, can be perceived as a nationalistic endeavour. This paper demonstrates that the three Hearn Museums have drawn a distinction between two types of nationalism, political and cultural, and that they represent Hearn as a cultural nationalist. Here, I argue that the narrative function of the museum text functions to establish a dichotomy of 'Old' Japan and 'New' Japan, and that the visitor is exposed to a nostalgic set of understandings about traditions that is contrasted to modernity. Before embarking on this argument, however, I introduce each of the three museums in Matsue, Kumamoto, and Yaizu.

## 1. The Hearn Museums

### 1-1. Matsue

The Lafcadio Hearn Memorial Museum (*Koizumi Yakumo Kinenkan*) in Matsue, Shimane Prefecture, is undoubtedly the most famous museum dedicated to Hearn in Japan.<sup>4</sup> The museum is 425.5 m<sup>2</sup> in size (including the garden), and boasts on average 150,000 visitors a year (Koizumi Yakumo Kinenkan 2007a, 2007c). Matsue, where Hearn lived from August 1890 to November 1891, is regarded as the place where he spent his happiest days in Japan after he first arrived and before the disillusion of later years set in.<sup>5</sup>

Matsue still treasures the memory of Hearn. There is a street called *Herun no michi* (Hearn street), and several other monuments related to Hearn, such as a stone monument in the Chidori Minami Park, are scattered across the city. A collection of books by and on Hearn, *Herun bunko* (Hearn Library) is kept in the City Library. The hotel where he stayed when he first came to Matsue identifies itself as 'the Koizumi Yakumo inn' and uses Hearn as a marketing

tool.<sup>6</sup> In travel guides to Matsue, the city is introduced as taking a pride in 'the scenery which Koizumi Yakumo loved' and as the city that Hearn 'introduced to the world' (Anon. 2002: 30, and Anon. 2003: 6). Moreover, when a proposal to build the prefectural university, Shimane University, in Matsue was first aired in 1947, 'Lafcadio Hearn University' was suggested as an appropriate name (Kajitani 1984/1987). Matsue is also remembered as the place where Hearn met and married the daughter of a local samurai family, Koizumi Setsu, whose family name Hearn later adopted.

The Matsue Museum has a much longer history than any other Hearn Museum. It was first built in 1933 next to Hearn's residence on a street in which many samurai homes have survived (some of these are still open to the public today). The construction of the museum may be related to an increasing awareness of the significance of Hearn triggered by the first publication of Hearn's collected works in Japanese translation in 1926-28, and to the general trend towards nationalism during the 1930s (Koizumi 1926-8). It should also be noted that Hearn's family donated some of his personal items to Matsue city in 1927 (Koizumi 2000: 219). Perhaps surprisingly, the museum was at first a Western-style building modelled on the Goethe Museum in Weimer, Germany. In 1984, however, in commemoration of the eightieth anniversary of Hearn's death, it was rebuilt into a traditional Japanese wooden building in sympathy with the traditional street of samurai homes. Architecturally, at least, Hearn's memory had been Japanified.

Exhibits include various personal belongings such as a desk, a chair, a book shelf, cigarette pipes, insect cages, bags, clothes, and manuscripts. Books both by and on Hearn are displayed, as are photographs. Since the exhibition focuses on Hearn's Matsue era, his interaction with some Matsue people who were kind to Hearn such as Nishida Sentarō, the principal of the school where Hearn taught English, are introduced. There is also a video corner where the visitors can look at two videos on Hearn.

Overall, three things are stressed in the museum exhibition. The first is how much Hearn loved 'Old Japan' – a phrase used to indicate the values and traditions of pre-Meiji Japan, a construct which is contrasted to the Westernized and increasingly industrialized 'New Japan' of the Meiji era (1868-1912) and beyond. One museum exhibit claims that 'Yakumo [Hearn] loved the Old Japan that has lived on since the Edo era. He loved its gentle heart that co-exists with nature, its sensibility in listening to the voices of the smallest things, its purity and honesty'. There is also a citation from a book by Setsu, Hearn's wife, which says that 'whenever he returned from school, he changed into Japanese clothes and smoked tobacco sitting on the *zabuton* cushion. As for meals, he ate Japanese food and used chopsticks like a Japanese. He liked doing everything in the Japanese style and drew closer to the Japanese way of life'. In reality, Hearn was not as Japanified as Setsu suggests, partaking, for instance, of a diet that was largely Western. As for his love for Japan, he later experienced disillusionment in Kumamoto. However, the museum consistently ignores Hearn's Western diet and negative feelings towards Japan.

The second is how 'Old Japan' is represented by Matsue and its people. In the museum pamphlet that is provided to all visitors upon arrival, it is noted that Hearn 'came to be fond of the landscape and kindly feelings of the people of Matsue' (Anon., n.d. a). The virtues of Setsu, a local woman, who was 'a good wife, a good assistant to the great writer, and a good mother' are emphasized. Another exhibit notes that 'For Yakumo, life in Matsue, a place abundant in myth, legend, history, and tradition, was (...) the honeymoon period in Japan'. The museum text thus commemorates him as a consistently uncritical, unambiguous lover of 'Old Japan'.

The third noticeable characteristic is the depiction of Hearn as a delicate folklorist. In one pamphlet, Hearn is depicted as 'a rare Western individual who was free from prejudice' and his anti-authoritarian position is emphasized (Anon., n.d. c). In video footage, it is claimed that Hearn was always sincere 'in listening to the common people'. Another comment claims that 'the handwritings in [Hearn's] manuscripts are very delicate and seem to reflect Yakumo's personality'. The museum thus depicts Hearn as an effeminate personality who was interested in delicate subtleties such as listening to the voices of insects (and, it is implied, uninterested in politics and economics).

The attraction of Matsue's Hearn Museum is not limited to the exhibition, but extends to Hearn's old residence which stands next door to the museum. Indeed, as is mentioned in one

pamphlet, those who visit the museum are able to enjoy not only the exhibition but also the traditional street and old samurai homes (Negishi 2004: 7). All exhibits are displayed in the museum, and so there are no exhibits inside the house apart from replicas of Hearn's desk and chair, the original of which are exhibited in the museum. Nevertheless, the old residence itself serves as a sort of 'house museum' which 'creates a vision of the person who inhabited that space' by 'the reconstruction of the living space' (Albano 2007: 15). Here, a nostalgic return to the proverbial 'good old days', a way of forgetting the hectic modern way of life, is promoted. The museum thus provides a door into the 'past'. The case of Takagi Taikan, a leading researcher of Hearn, is a typical example. In his paper on his visit to Hearn's old residence and the Museum in Matsue, Takagi noted:

When we cross the *Nandaimon* (The Great South Gate) [of Hōryūji Temple in Nara], we are immediately detached from the vulgar world. When I crossed the gate of Hearn's old residence, I was captured by a similar feeling and overwhelmed with awe (...). Though Hearn lived here only for a little more than a year, this is the house he loved most of all during his stay in Japan. While taking off my shoes at the door, I held my breath, thinking that Hearn's soul is still alive in this house (Takagi 1975/1978: 1).

This reverential and romantic reading of this particular 'place of memory' is not limited to Takagi. The old residence, as a major part of the museum exhibition, is presented in a way that functions to promote a nostalgic romanticism. In an English-language pamphlet, 'To Visitors of Lafcadio Hearn's Old Residence', visitors are encouraged to experience for themselves what Hearn went through. For example, '[t]he visitor is kindly requested to take off his shoes, as Hearn used to do, before getting into the entrance hall. He will open the *shoji* [slide door] on the left....' (Negishi 1922). Thus visitors are supposed to enjoy the house and garden from various angles, just as Hearn purportedly used to. The image of Hearn is used to remind visitors of a 'traditional' Japanese sensibility and ethos that, it is implied, is under threat in postwar Japan. Indeed, Hearn's works are sometimes treated as a precious record of Meiji period life and people and, in the Matsue Hearn Museum, Hearn is presented as a sensitive folklorist who recorded those Japanese virtues that have since disappeared or that are disappearing. It may not be a coincidence that the current curator of the Matsue Hearn Museum (and also Hearn's great-grandson), Koizumi Bon, depicts Hearn as 'a folklorist' (Koizumi, 1995). Thus the Hearn Museum serves not only as a place of memory in commemorating Hearn, but also as a means of preserving old customs and sensibilities and showing visitors what things ought to be as well as what things used to be.

This point is clarified even further in the short educational course provided by the museum for children, 'School for Children: The Hearn Super Course' (*kodomo juku – sūpā Herun-san kōza*). Koizumi Bon deplores the spiritual poverty of modern children, and notes that the intention of this course is to enrich children's 'power of imagination' (*sōzōryoku*) – a power which Hearn purportedly treasured (Koizumi 2005: 24). Koizumi Bon attributes both the increasing youth crime rate and the overall moral decline of modern children to the fact that many children no longer engage in activities Japanese children used to enjoy, such as catching insects or admiring the sunset (Koizumi 2005: 22). The course therefore attempts to enrich the sensibility of children by encouraging them to experience these 'traditional' activities. Here Hearn and 'Old Japan' represent a particular sensibility and both are mobilized in an attempt to save modern children from spiritual poverty. Moreover, although there is no direct cooperation between the museum and local schools, school children do visit the museum as a part of school programs (Koizumi Yakumo Kinenkan 2007c). In this sense, the museum attempts to function as a place for social improvement.

## 1-2. Kumamoto

Another Hearn Museum is located in Kumamoto, where Hearn lived from November 1891 to October 1894, teaching English at the Fifth High School (which became Kumamoto University after the war).<sup>7</sup> As the name of the museum, The Old Residence of Koizumi Yakumo in Kumamoto (*Koizumi Yakumo Kumamoto kyūkyō*), suggests, this museum is a true 'house

museum'. A proposal to demolish the house was submitted in 1960, but a committee to preserve the old residence (*kyūkyo hozonkai*) was formed, members of which collected donations from the graduates of the Fifth High School. As a result, in 1961, parts of the house originally located elsewhere were moved to today's site (Anseichō) and reassembled. In 1968, the house was designated as a cultural treasure by Kumamoto city (the re-evaluation of Japanese traditions might be linked to the nostalgic movement from the 1970s onward, mentioned below). In 1995, the house, which is 165 m<sup>2</sup> in size, was restored. It is once again a traditional samurai residence with *tatami* mats and seven spacious open rooms with almost no furniture and with garden views from every angle (Koizumi Yakumo Kumamoto kyūkyo 2007b). As is the case in Matsue, the 'house museum' is able to create a bibliographical narrative that ties Hearn to traditional Japanese architecture.

Kumamoto is a place to which Hearn did not respond positively (at least at first). It is often said that Hearn disliked Kumamoto because it represented an industrialized modern Japan, while Matsue represented the idyllic traditional Japan he so admired. Those who depict Hearn as a folklorist emphasize the differences between 'New' versus 'Old' Japan, and the Westernized (therefore rational and cold-hearted) elite and the traditional (therefore humane and simple) common people (Makino 1992: 48, Koizumi 1995). This contrast, however, is not necessarily valid. For it was the common people whom Hearn disliked in Kumamoto. Hearn suggests that the old/new dichotomy was personified by the differing manners of the people, writing that:

I don't like the Kyūshū [Kumamoto] people – the common people. In Izumo [Matsue] all was soft, gentle, old-fashioned. Here the peasants and the lower classes drink and fight and beat their wives and make me mad to think that I wrote all the Japanese were angels (Hearn 1892).

To his dismay, the perceived lack of courtesy of the common people in Kumamoto, who were not necessarily Westernized or modernized, and were therefore in a sense 'traditional', did not live up to his notions of the virtues of 'old-fashioned' Japanese as embodied by the people of Matsue. Nevertheless, Hearn later came to appreciate the stoic and Spartan 'Kumamoto spirit', which he explains as 'the love of what is plain and good and simple, and the hatred of useless luxury and extravagance in life' (Hearn 1894).<sup>8</sup> As a result, perhaps, Hearn is remembered with affection in Kumamoto together with other literary figures linked with the city, such as Natsume Sōseki and Tokutomi Sohō. There is a stone monument to Hearn in Kumamoto University (again, a Japanified Hearn is standing in traditional Japanese dress), and the old railway station which was depicted in Hearn's 'At the Railway Station' was, with the help of admirers, preserved (Anon. 2006). As is the case in Matsue, there is no direct cooperation between the museum and the local schools, yet school children visit the museum as a part of their school program (Koizumi Yakumo Kumamoto kyūkyo 2007b). The museum used to boast 10,000 visitors a year until a decade ago when an admission fee was introduced. Today, it attracts about 6,000 visitors a year (Koizumi Yakumo Kumamoto kyūkyo 2007a).

The museum does not (overtly) mention Hearn's love and hate relationship with Kumamoto. Instead of introducing any negative remarks about either Kumamoto or Japan, the museum appears to have decided to treasure (and create) the memory of Hearn as a lover of traditional Japan. Pamphlets provided to visitors use similar expressions to the pamphlets in Matsue. Thus it is said that Hearn 'was attracted to the virtues of Old Japan and the sensibility of the Japanese people', and, 'despite being a foreigner, Yakumo loved Japanese culture more passionately than any Japanese' (Anon. n.d. d). One episode introduced by the museum as typical is the fact that Hearn especially ordered the construction of a Shintō home shrine, where he worshipped every morning. Again, Hearn in contemporary memory has been Japanified. Because of Hearn's (initial) dislike of the city, the Kumamoto Museum arguably makes a greater effort in forgetting than the Matsue Museum.

Exhibits include various personal belongings such as Hearn's desk (a replica of the desk exhibited in the Matsue Hearn Museum), photographs, letters, and his will. As is the case in Matsue, the exhibition focuses on Hearn and his hometown (Kumamoto). Perhaps due to Hearn's ambivalent feelings towards the city, however, the exhibition struggles to articulate a clear message. Hearn later was to appraise the stoic Spartan spirit he believed was characteristic of Kumamoto as an essential element in Japan's struggle to survive. This is an example of his



interest in politics, and the museum could have chosen to shed light on his pragmatic, masculine aspects (and by doing so Kumamoto could have differentiated itself from Matsue and Yaizu in a more positive way). Nevertheless, the museum instead opted to follow the trend of depicting Hearn as a sensitive folklorist.

Located in the center of the city and surrounded by tall concrete buildings, the traditional wooden house that is the Kumamoto Hearn Museum stands alone. Despite lacking the nostalgic mood of a traditional street, 'the ghostly presence' of the writer in the quiet peaceful samurai house functions as a reminder of a bygone age (Albano 2007: 20).

### 1-3. Yaizu

The last Hearn Museum, the Yaizu Hearn Museum (*Yaizu Koizumi Yakumo kinenkan*), which opened in 2007 on 27 June, Hearn's birthday, is in Yaizu, Shizuoka Prefecture. Previously Yaizu had only a modest permanent Hearn exhibition in the city museum with little to exhibit. The city museum was built in 1985 and the Hearn exhibition has been a permanent fixture ever since. In 1992, a regulation concerning the collection of funds for the construction of a Hearn Museum was issued, and the collection of donations was begun by the Yaizu Hearn Society in 1997. By 2005, the total amount collected is said to be about one billion fifty million yen (or roughly £650,000) (Anon. 2005). The plan to construct the Yaizu Hearn Museum was finally realized this year. The significance of the timing of its construction may be related to the nationalistic sentiment increasing in Japan today (see below).

Yaizu is the place Hearn visited with his family during the summer months while working for the Tokyo Imperial University from 1897 to 1903. Since Hearn disliked Tokyo, he wanted to find a place where the people lived up to the exemplary model of simple kindness embodied by the people of Matsue. The attraction of Yaizu for Hearn was the beach where he could swim and Yamaguchi Otokichi, an honest fisherman who looked after Hearn and his family while they stayed in Yaizu.

Like Matsue, Yaizu treasures the memory of Hearn and is eager to identify itself as Hearn's hometown.<sup>9</sup> There is a stone monument to Hearn that depicts Hearn's profile, a citation from Hearn's writings on Yaizu at the Yaizu Train Station, and his name is mentioned on the gates of those temples he liked. Moreover, a street along the ocean is called 'Yakumo Street' (*Yakumo dōri*). As is the case with the other Hearn Museums, there is no direct cooperation between the museum and local schools, but school children nevertheless do visit the museum as a part of their school program. However, the Yaizu Hearn Museum seems to be very active. It organized a lecture course for school children in August 2007, and constantly provides information on events at the museum to the local schools (Yaizu Koizumi Yakumo Kinenkan 2007b).

Before 2007, Yaizu had very few exhibits with which to commemorate Hearn. In 1970, Otokichi's house in which Hearn stayed was dismantled and reassembled in the Meiji Village (*Meiji mura*) in Aichi Prefecture.<sup>10</sup> Hearn's personal belongings are exhibited in Matsue. Yaizu faced an uphill struggle in its attempt to portray itself as a 'Hearn hometown'. Nevertheless, in 2005, the city announced plans to construct a Hearn Museum, using money donated by Hearn's admirers. Because of the lack of exhibits, the 'greatest problem is how to make the museum attractive for visitors' and 'how to persuade citizens to return' (Anon. 2005). Thus, unlike Matsue and Kumamoto, Yaizu as a 'place of memory' has to create memory rather than remember it, and to invent rather than forget.

Since Otokichi's house is now in the Meiji Village, the Yaizu Hearn Museum could not use a traditional Japanese house as a 'house museum' in promoting a Japanified image of Hearn. Instead, the museum is a modern concrete building situated in the city center where the City Museum and City Library are located. At 495.95 m<sup>2</sup>, it is the largest of all the Hearn Museums (Yaizu Koizumi Yakumo Kinenkan, 2007b). Thanks to this location (and also perhaps to the free admission), quite a few Yaizu citizens have visited the Hearn Museum already. There are fifty to sixty visitors daily and, as of 15 September 2007, a total of 10,000 visitors since the opening (Yaizu Koizumi Yakumo kinenkan, 2007b). Yaizu's wish to create a major sightseeing venue seems to have been successfully realized.

Compared with the erstwhile permanent exhibition, which only occupied a small corner

of the city museum, the newly-opened Hearn Museum is much more impressive in terms of both space and contents. What is most remarkable is a set of letters sent from Hearn to his wife during his stays in Yaizu. The cheerful tone of the letters supports the curator's narrative, which emphasizes the happy nature of Hearn's stay in Yaizu. Other exhibits include photographs of Otokichi, his house, and his famous *daruma* doll, photographs of the temples Hearn liked to visit, and a few personal belongings such as a pipe (these exhibits had already been exhibited at the City Museum).

As is the case with Matsue and Kumamoto, the exhibition focuses on the connection between Hearn and his hometown (Yaizu), and his happy experiences there. There is a video corner where visitors are able to see videos which stress Hearn's love for the good and artless people of Yaizu. The museum depicts this love not (only) as an expression of Hearn's innocent taste, but also as a conscientious choice of the *spiritual* culture of Japan which is contrasted to the *material* West (this also implies a criticism of contemporary Japan's infatuation with materialism). In the museum narrative, Hearn is described as someone 'who hated Western material civilization and loved the modest unique culture of this country [Japan]'. Of all the Hearn Museums, the Yaizu Hearn Museum seems to be most determined to depict the contemporary relevance of a Hearn who is said to have loved a spiritually rich Japan. When asked about the theme of its exhibition, the Yaizu Hearn Museum replied as follows:

Yakumo literature [Hearn's works] show us the power of the nation that we inherited from our ancient ancestors and are now forgetting. We hope that the Yaizu Hearn Museum will function to serve to encourage people to look back on what we have lost or are losing, instead of only looking forward and progressing, and to cross a bridge to the future (Yaizu Koizumi Yakumo Kinenkan 2007a).

Perhaps because of this clear intention, the Yaizu Hearn Museum leaves a strong impression on visitors.

## 2. Hearn as a folklorist: contemporary Japan and the politics of nostalgia

The first obvious conclusion to be drawn from this consideration of the representation of Hearn in the three Hearn Museums is that they agree in their depiction of Hearn as an irrepressible Japanophile, pure and simple. All exhibitions include various objects and images that are used to construct a biographical narrative of a Japanified Hearn who loved 'Old Japan'. This narrative also serves to promote a nostalgia about the past that is used to promote a moral rereading of Japan's modernization. According to the Matsue Hearn Museum, there has been, to date, no cooperative attempt between the museums to create a complete and unified image of Hearn (Koizumi Yakumo Kinenkan 2007b). Nevertheless, all the exhibitions are identical in their emphasis on Hearn as a sensitive folklorist who loved 'Old Japan' and who lamented the disappearance of its virtues through modernization. Echoing a paradigmatic contrast between an organic *Gemeinschaft* and a mechanical *Gesellschaft*, Japanese 'tradition' (or 'Old Japan') is idealized as embodying an innocent and humane sensibility, in opposition to the pragmatism and cold rationality of the modern (Western) civilization adopted by the modernizing Japan (or 'New Japan'). Hearn is depicted in a similar way to the hero (played by Tom Cruise) in the Hollywood film, *The Last Samurai* (2004), a Westerner who came to newly modernizing Japan and sides with the last remaining samurai who represent the old, organic virtues and the chivalric honor that are being destroyed through ruthless modernization. Here, a sense of nostalgia about a past that is not subjected to any critical analysis underlies the representations.

It is easy to find fault with the museum representations and texts. The dichotomy of an 'Old' and a 'New' Japan reflects an overly simplified view of modern Japanese history and ignores the constantly changing and fluid nature of 'Old Japan'. Moreover, the simplified depiction of Hearn is unhistorical in that it does not fully reflect what we know of Hearn. As Ōta notes, Hearn reveals a much more ambiguous position in his letters, in which he sometimes speaks of Japan with abhorrence. Ōta insists that the letters reveal the *real* Hearn, and that the widely accepted image of Hearn as a lover of Japan is a 'myth' (Ōta 1994). While Ōta's position is somewhat overstated, it is nevertheless true that Hearn did express occasional disgust for Japan (as is seen in his stated dislike of the common people of Kumamoto). Like many foreign

admirers of Japan, his love of the country co-existed, paradoxically, with dislike, in a cycle Basil Hall Chamberlain called 'the Swing of the Pendulum' (Chamberlain 1894).

Since Hearn was a complex writer and persona who can be interpreted in various ways, his persona as a romantic lover of Japan is only part of the truth. For example, he had a strong scientific interest, mentioning his wish to take his son abroad to 'give him a purely scientific education' (Hearn 1895a). Hearn was also pragmatic, encouraging his students to study 'practical' subjects in order to survive in the modern era (Hearn 1895b, 1896).<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, as will be mentioned below, Hearn makes some remarks that have much in common with Japan's wartime ideology. Nevertheless, these aspects of his thinking have been omitted from the museum exhibitions. In this sense, museum representation is the product of a certain *selection*, if not distortion, of forgetting as much as remembering, and the result of specific political aims – namely to depoliticize Hearn in order to use him to propagate nostalgia. In other words, Hearn Museums are engaged in the politics of depoliticizing Hearn by ignoring the scientific, pragmatic, and martial aspects of his character.

These political aims, however, are overlooked for two reasons. First, any museum exhibition (at least in a country such as post-war Japan where freedom of speech is constitutionally guaranteed) can be viewed as embodying one interpretation among various possible interpretations. Those who dislike the romanticized view of Hearn can always advocate an alternative view by constructing another memorial to his complex personality. Second, ordinary admirers of Hearn are not interested in the reality of Hearn. Rather, they find in Hearn what they want to find. Hearn matters to them not necessarily because of who he really was, but because of what he represents: the 'good old days' of traditional Japan. Hearn Museums thus satisfy the visitors by using Hearn as a vehicle of nostalgia.

In the Japanese context, to simplify Hearn as a romantic lover of Japan and to feel nostalgic about the 'good old days' is, needless to say, a nationalistic endeavor. Hearn Museums will reject this view since 'nationalism' in postwar Japan has been viewed with such negativity because of Japan's wartime militarism. Indeed, as Asaba notes, 'nationalism has long been identified with [wartime] fascism, militarism, and expansionism' (Asaba 2004: 25). The Hearn Museums, though 'nationalistic' in a sense, obviously do not wish to be seen as 'nationalistic' in the way that wartime Japan was nationalistic.

This is why Hearn's reputation as a folklorist matters. The object of folklore is to depict the culture of the common people, and, because of its non-authoritarian stance, its love of tradition is not offensive to those who are critical of the wartime right-wing nationalism. Indeed, there was a time during the war when converts from the left found a haven in folklore studies (Nakamura 1974: 51). By depicting Hearn as a folklorist, Japanese 'tradition' is depoliticized, represented as embodying the old customs and folklores of an innocent common people, and identified as a soft and feminine sensibility and spirituality. Here, in Zolberg's terms, the past is 'sanitized, made unthreatening, albeit rather entertaining' (Zolberg 1996: 80). Thus the museums can be nationalistic without being associated with the brutality of Japan's past. In other words, by confining Hearn to the narrow and peaceful terrain of culture, museum representations can safely advocate the virtues of traditional Japan. Paradoxically, it is in this depoliticizing process that the politics of Hearn Museums can be found.

This point is clarified if we compare the Hearn Museums to more overtly nationalistic museums such as the Yūshūkan Museum in the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo which challenges the erstwhile demonized view of wartime Japan and attempts to justify the position of wartime Japan, by explaining the socio-political realities the nation faced as a non-Western, non-Caucasian Empire.<sup>12</sup> In the pictorial record book of Yūshūkan (available at the Museum Shop), the Second World War is described as 'a war that could not be avoided in order to establish a modern state, to achieve Japan's independence and self-defence, and, seen from the viewpoint of world history, in order to establish a liberal and egalitarian world in which no one is discriminated against on the basis of skin color' (Yasukuni jinja (ed) 2003: 2). Hearn Museums are devoid of this kind of challenge. They differentiate between what they define as 'tradition' from aspects of the pre-war culture that were denounced as 'feudalistic' after the war. In other words, it is not 'Old Japan' that brought about the wartime militarism, but rather the 'New Japan' that betrayed the ideals of 'Old Japan'. All Hearn Museums certainly maintain a distance from (politically) nationalistic museums such as Yūshūkan.



Ironically, however, Hearn and Yasukuni are not completely unrelated. The Yasukuni Shrine is a shrine originally built to commemorate the death of those who fought for the Meiji Government, and all who subsequently died in the battles of modern Japan are enshrined there.<sup>13</sup> Unlike other shrines where noted people or gods are celebrated, Yasukuni is unique in that it commemorates ordinary people (Öe 1984: 15). The only condition for being enshrined was 'an honorary death in battle' (*meiyo no senshi*), that is, to die for the Emperor (Öe 1984: 16). Because of the enshrinement of Second World War A-class war criminals such as Tōjō Hideki, visits by Japanese Prime Ministers have become increasingly criticized since the 1980s by countries such as China and Korea as a symbol of what is perceived as Japan's lack of guilt for its wartime conduct and even as a return to wartime militarism. Kobori, a leading critic in postwar Japan, argues for the Prime Minister's visit to Yasukuni Shrine, using Hearn to justify his position (Kobori 1999). He cites Hearn's last book, *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation* (1904), which favourably refers to the Yasukuni Shrine. According to Hearn:

it is certainly to the long discipline of the past that she [Japan] owes the moral strength behind this unexpected display of aggressive power [the war with Russia]. (...) and all its splendid courage – a courage that does not mean indifference to life, but the desire to sacrifice life at the bidding of the Imperial Master who raises the rank of the dead. From the thousands of young men now being summoned to the war, one hears no expression of hope to return to their homes with glory; – the common wish uttered is only to win remembrance at the Shōkonsha – that 'Spirit Invoking Temple', where the souls of all who die for Emperor and fatherland are believed to gather. At no time was the ancient faith stronger than in this hour of struggle (...) No more irrational assertion was ever made about the Japanese than the statement of their indifference to religion. Religion is still, as it has ever been, the very life of the people – the motive and directing power of their every action (Hearn 1904/1922: 440-1).

Needless to say, 'Shōkonsha' is the old name of Yasukuni Shrine.<sup>14</sup> Kobori finds a strong supporter of Yasukuni in Hearn. What is remarkable in the citation is that Hearn actually approved of the idea of people sacrificing themselves for the Emperor. In an early twentieth century view shared by many in the West, particularly Japan's major naval ally, Britain, Hearn idealized Japan's nationalistic endeavor in fighting Russia as a 'Yellow Hope', and believed that Japan's chivalrous spirit could be held up as a model for the West (de Gruchy 2003: 26-27). Hearn discovered the core of Japan's strength in the national religion, Shintō, which was led by the Emperor. Because of this stance, Hearn has a history of being interpreted in a way that justifies militarism, and there are indeed elements in Hearn's writings, as Ōta notes, that could be easily used by any wishing to do so (Ōta 1994: 133). This is probably the reason why Hearn Museums are so eager to depoliticize Hearn and to depict him as a folklorist.

### 3. The problem of modernization

While it is to a degree understandable that Hearn Museums try to maintain some distance from overtly nationalistic museums like Yūshūkan, we should not forget the fact that they face the same fundamental challenge: the challenge posed by the Westernization policy of modern Japan – a policy typically seen in the slogan, *datsu-A nyū-Ō* (Leave Asia and Join the West), which encouraged Japan to adopt modern Western civilization and to abandon its native traditions. In terms of anti-materialistic and anti-Eurocentric ideology, the representation of Hearn in the Hearn Museums and Japan's militaristic wartime ideology share much in common. Because of the detachment from politics, however, Hearn Museums are able to highlight the problems of modernization while avoiding controversial political issues. In other words, by depoliticizing Hearn and thus by depoliticizing themselves, the Hearn Museums can address the more universal problem of modernization, instead of minimizing the issue to a simple justification (or denunciation) of wartime Japan.

The problem of modernization is, in a word, the sense of loss caused by rapid modernization and the abandonment of traditions. It is true that modernization policies benefited Japan, first saving Japan from Western colonization and, after the Second World War,

helping Japan create a Western, industrialized democracy. However, these benefits came at a great cost. Although Japan boasts the world's second largest economy today, a sense of loss is widespread. Of course, the modern sense of loss and nostalgia is not limited to Japan but is a universal phenomenon. For example, Urry mentions 'a pervasive sense of nostalgia' in Britain, attributing it to 'the view that contemporary social life is deeply disappointing' (Urry 1996: 52). However, in Japan, where modernization was carried out more drastically and rapidly, and over a much shorter period, the sense of nostalgia is even stronger. As Gerster notes, '[n]owhere is the touristic compulsion of nostalgia more evident than in Japan' and nowhere are anxieties 'people feel about modernity and its consequences' (or modernization and Westernization) 'more acute' than in Japan (Gerster 2005: 294, 299, 300). In fact, the popularity of Hearn since the 1970s is related to the boom of 'nostalgic Japan' that romanticizes traditional streets and houses (Koizumi 1995: 228). People want to get away from the unsightly modern streets of concrete, tangled power line, and neon lights, and enjoy an environment which is neat and pretty. Visitors to the Matsue Museum wish to escape from the hectic industrial society and to be healed rather than enlightened. Like British museum visitors who seek a 'golden age' in the past (Urry 1996: 52), visitors to the Hearn Museums also want to find Japan's 'golden age'. The true Hearn or the true past is not necessarily their concern. Hearn Museums thus function to gratify the emotional needs of a rapidly modernized nation.

Despite superficial differences, both cultural nationalism and political nationalism derive from a similar perception of the moral decay so lamented in contemporary Japan. Today, the moral decline of post-war Japan has become a major public issue. Proliferating political and business scandals, deteriorating public order, and a rising crime rate are often attributed to the postwar denial of Japanese traditions, the embrace of the West, and the lack of patriotism (Ishida 2005; also see Shinozawa 1999 and Izaki 2005). Those who have a sense of crisis often advocate a return to rather rigoristic prewar ethics such as those embodied in 'The Imperial Rescript on Education' (*Kyōiku chokugo*) of 1890.<sup>15</sup> (And of course, those who have an interest in social improvement, yet want to maintain a distance from an ethic that had a significant impact on wartime ideology, speak out for a folkloristic sensitivity as the Hearn Museums do.) In these circumstances, Yasukuni Yūshūkan and the values it represents, such as loyalty and patriotism, have recently started to be re-examined and even re-evaluated. As noted above, 'nationalism' has long represented wartime militarism. Japanese today, however, have become much less allergic to nationalism.

The fundamental difference between Yūshūkan and the Hearn Museums lies in the question about whether any re-examination or re-evaluation of Japanese 'tradition' is truly possible without mentioning the Second World War. Yūshūkan's answer, needless to say, is that it is not. As Lummis notes, people believe that Japan was defeated in the Second World War by 'Western civilization' and this idea shapes today's politics and culture (Lummis 1981: 186). In other words, Japan's defeat represents not merely a defeat in terms of technology or intelligence, but a defeat in terms of culture and its ethos.

This is why postwar Japan devoted itself to modernization with such enthusiasm. As Ivy notes, this enthusiasm is what Herf called a 'reactionary modernism' born from the sense of war guilt (Ivy 1995: 14). What Yasukuni is trying to do is to recover the prewar ethos by re-examining the meaning of the Second World War. Although it is true that its exhibition is one-sided and omits any negative aspects of wartime Japan, its position is not entirely unworthy. After witnessing the technological slaughter of the First World War, prewar Japan attempted to provide a solution to the problem of modernization whereby the notion of progress was re-examined and a new philosophy was looked for. Indeed, 'the new culturalism of the 1930s proposed that Japan was appointed to lead the world to a higher level of cultural synthesis that surpassed Western modernism itself' (Najita 1998: 208).

Ian Buruma's *Occidentalism* successfully attempts to understand anti-western ideologies, including Japan's 'overcoming modern' movement that provided the philosophical base for Japan's wartime ideology (Buruma and Margalit 2004). What is missing in his discussion about 'overcoming modern', however, is an understanding of its forward-looking aspect. The original intention of Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945), the leading philosopher of this movement, was to overcome, not to reject, modernity. His philosophy was not a backward-looking revival of the past but a forward-looking attempt to combine Japanese culture and Western individual

freedom to create a better future (Goto-Jones 2005).

Since the attempt was distorted by Japanese chauvinism, any attempt to justify wartime Japan has long been taboo. Yet what wartime Japan originally tried to tackle is linked to what Hearn attempted to tackle. That is, to question 'the moral basis of modern industrial and commercial society' (Yu 1964: 226). This is a problem which is by no means limited to Japan or Hearn. Indeed, according to Yu, this is a theme 'which profoundly disturbed many thinkers in the Victorian world' (Yu 1964: 226). To deny the prewar ethos means to deny this attempt. And, according to some at least, it is exactly this denial that is the cause of today's moral decline in Japan.

The irony is now clear. Because of the denial of a traditional ethos, modern Japanese people eagerly devote themselves to modernization. Modernization produces a sense of loss and nostalgia, which in turn promotes the popularity of a Japanified Hearn. The situation surrounding the Hearn Museums is thus by no means simple.

## Conclusion

This paper has examined Japanese museum representations of Lafcadio Hearn. In each Hearn Museum, Hearn is depicted as a sensitive folklorist who sided with the traditions of 'Old Japan'. This peaceful depiction of Hearn is related to the memory and the trauma of the past. Due to extreme historical sensitivities in the Japanese body politic, Hearn Museums have depoliticized the writer and attempted to achieve two contradictory aims: to evoke nationalism and make Japanese proud of their traditions, and yet to avoid political issues such as any justification of wartime Japan. Hearn Museums have been successful, to the extent that they have encouraged visitors to re-evaluate the spiritual richness of traditional culture which is absent in today's materialistically rich Japan.

However, the museums also struggle in tackling the problem of modernization. Since 'reactionary modernity' is born out of the postwar denial of Japanese culture and ethos, it may not be possible to face the issue of modernization without confronting (or even merely mentioning) the war. It goes without saying there were many shameful dimensions to Japan's long military campaign in Asia and the Pacific in the 1930s and 1940s, but it is also true that there was a serious attempt to tackle the universal issue of modernity in a productive way in (at least Nishida's version of) 'overcoming modernity'. Despite the backward-looking depiction of Hearn as a symbol of nostalgia, Hearn himself, like Nishida, was actually more forward looking, and had an avid interest in synthesizing the East and the West to create a 'higher future' (Hearn 1904/1922: 438).

Japanese today have become much less suspicious of (political) nationalism and are more ready to discuss the past (and the future) in a more constructive sense. It is time, perhaps, for Hearn Museums to move beyond nostalgia. I believe Hearn can provide a rich resource 'to prompt active participation in public debate concerning future paths of national development' (Bennett 1995: 135). It is then that the Hearn Museums will function as places of enlightenment that truly tackle the problem of modernization.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See, for example, Yanagita's remark, 'no foreigner is a better observer of Japan than Mr. Koizumi [Hearn]'. Yanagita (1931/1990: 89). Umehara asserts that 'Hearn understood the meaning of Japanese thought much more deeply than any purely Japanese person'. Umehara (1990/1993: 305). Sharkey notes that 'perhaps no foreign writer has won such a place of honour and distinction in the imagination of the people of Japan'. Sharkey (1997: 138).
- <sup>2</sup> O'Reilly (1997: xii). Also see the well-known remark, 'Lafcadio Hearn is almost as Japanese as haiku' (Anon. 1972: ix).

- <sup>3</sup> For major studies on Hearn and his works, see in particular Hirakawa (ed) (1997), Hirakawa (ed) (2000), and Hirakawa (2004).
- <sup>4</sup> The following is based on materials collected during visits to Matsue in November 2005 and October 2007.
- <sup>5</sup> On Hearn and Matsue, see in particular Ikeno (2004).
- <sup>6</sup> The hotel, Ōhashikan, which used to be called the Tomitaya Inn, is located at the heart of Matsue city, looking over the Ōhashi River and Lake Shinji. A hotel pamphlet states that 'the man of letters, Koizumi Yakumo, who is known for *Kwaidan* and *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, is said to have relaxed at our window looking over the flowing river and enjoying the old Japan of a hundred years ago' (Anon., n.d. b).
- <sup>7</sup> The following is based on materials collected during a visit to Kumamoto in February 2006.
- <sup>8</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, 'The Future of the Far East', a speech given at Kumamoto Fifth High School on 27 January 1894, available at [http://www.kumamotokokufu-h.ed.jp/kumamoto/bungaku/y\\_future.html](http://www.kumamotokokufu-h.ed.jp/kumamoto/bungaku/y_future.html).
- <sup>9</sup> The following is based on materials collected during visits to Yaizu in March 2006 and September 2007.
- <sup>10</sup> 'Meiji Village' is a village-sized (1,000,000 m<sup>2</sup>) museum in which many buildings built during the Meiji era are preserved and exhibited to commemorate the Meiji life-style and architecture. Otokichi's house has been preserved mainly because of Hearn. Confirmed during a visit to the Meiji Village in July 2006.
- <sup>11</sup> For instance, Hearn writes as follows (italics in the original).  

I think you ought to study what would not be *practical* use to you in after-life. I am always glad to hear of a student studying engineering, architecture, medicine (– if he has the particular moral character which medicine requires), or any branch of applied science (Hearn 1895b).

Don't forget at least to *think* about my advice to take a scientific course *if you can* (...). Japan, for at least fifty years to come, must turn all her talents to practical matters, – even her arts. It will be like America before the present century. The practical man – botanist, chemist, engineer, architect, will always be independent (Hearn, 1896).
- <sup>12</sup> This was confirmed during a visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in February 2007.
- <sup>13</sup> Construction began in June 1869 and was completed in May 1872. Kobori (1999: 4).
- <sup>14</sup> It was officially called 'Tokyo Shōkonsha', but renamed 'Yasukuni jinja' (Yasukuni Shrine) in 1879. Kobori (1999: 4). Yu, B. (1964)

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